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chool Editors Get Hot Story On Radiation

By Robert Pear

Washington Star Staff Writer

Two Walt Whitman High School editors say they were "astounded" by the public reaction to their story that radiation was detected at the U.S. ambassador's residence in Moscow during a 1959 visit by then-Vice President Richard M. Nixon. The story appeared Friday on page 3 of the Black & White, the student newspaper of the Bethesda high school where Michael Gill and Richard Berke are seniors. "We couldn't put it on Page 1," Gill said, "because we're still basically a high school newspaper. Our teacher dictates that in-depth stories go on page three." Anyway, Page 1 of the newspaper was taken up with a story about teenagers drinking, a list of reading test scores and pictures of painted fire hydrants.

BERKE, editor in chief of the Black & White, said that he and Gill had to bear some abuse from fellow students who said the story "was worthless, wasn't true and shouldn't be printed in a high school paper."

Intrigued with news stories earlier this year about microwave radiation beamed at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, the two 17-year-old students dug for additional details. They found a friendly but anonymous source who told them that heavy radiation had also been detected in 1959 in the Moscow residence of then-Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson.

Nixon stayed in the ambassador's house during his 1959 visit. The high radiation levels were discovered by Secret Service agents accompanying Nixon.

The story from the school paper was picked up by the Associated Press and distributed to newspapers and radio and television stations across the country.

GILL, news editor of the Black & White, said he was "quite astounded that the story was thought to be so important." Berke said he

was "shocked" that it had generated such interest.

Berke lives at 6524 Elgin Lane, Bethesda, with his father, an economist in the antitrust division of the Justice Department, and his mother, a social worker with the Jewish Social Service Agency in Rockville.

He has been interested in newspapers since he started one of his own at Banockburn Elementary School in Bethesda. He plans to enter the University of Michigan this fall and hopes to become a journalist.

Gill, who lives at 8712 Ewing Drive, Bethesda, is going to Villanova University in Pennsylvania and is considering a legal career. His father is a public relations man and his mother is a conservator of paintings.

Berke said he had never been to Russia and is "kind of afraid to go now."

Many high school newspapers, Berke said, have improved in style and accuracy over the last few years. "They're not doing the same trite stories every month about school plays and fire drills," he added.

Berke and Gill, who are being compared by their friends to Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the Washington Post, met their "source" at a "greasy spoon" snack bar in Bethesda, Berke said.

After the story was published, Berke said, the school principal asked who the source was, but the boys weren't telling.

"We weren't necessarily looking for what we found," Gill said, "but we sure found something good."

Russian radiation thought 'diabolical'

Ed. Note: This story explores the facts and implications of radiation at the United States Embassy in Moscow through the assistance of a highly placed government official who requested anonymity. Some of the facts contained herein have never been publicly revealed before and are exclusive to the BLACK & WHITE.

by Michael Gill and Richard Berke

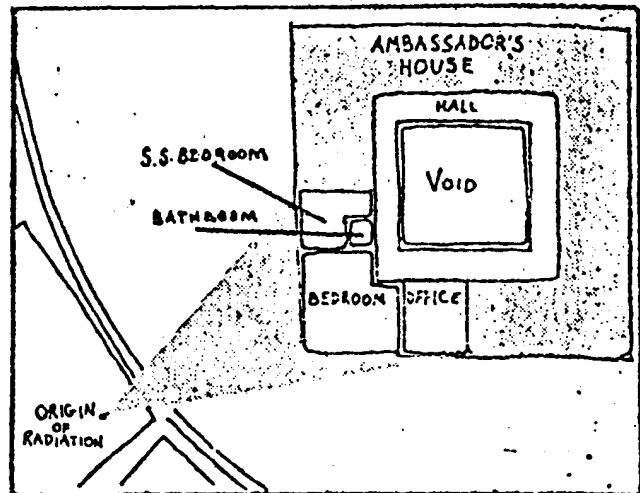
©1976 by Michael Gill and Richard Berke

In early February 1976, full-scale radiation bombardment of the United States Embassy in Moscow by the Russians was first made public. The

equipment - detectors and film badges - similar to those used by the Civil Defense Department and the Atomic Energy Commission, respectively.

During the entire three weeks of advance security sweeps of the embassy, also known as the Spaso House, the agents discovered no traceable radiation. Upon Nixon's arrival July 24, 1959, however, a deviation from this pattern of stability became evident.

While Nixon was at the Soviet television network on the first evening of his visit giving a talk to the Russian people, a secret service agent went to a naked light bulb in the embassy hall outside the Ambassador's bedroom, where



surveillance would not be necessary radiation, and therefore the mystery remains unsolved. The official Russian

Diagram of U.S. ambassador's residence accompanied high school paper's account of Moscow radiation.